

Cooper Tire lockout in second month

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Workers from the Findlay, Ohio Cooper Tire factory are manning the picket lines for the fifth week after being locked out by management on November 28. The plant is being run by temporary labor hired to scab on the 1,050 plant workers, who rejected company demands for far-reaching cuts in wages and benefits.

No negotiations have taken place since December 13 and will not take place until after the new year.

The workers, members of United Steel Workers Local 207L, are angered by the company's deepening demands after working for years under concessions contracts and giving up millions of dollars in wages and lost jobs. Meanwhile, Cooper Tire & Rubber Co. has reported record profits and CEO Roy V. Armes saw his compensation package increase by almost 50 percent from the previous year, to \$4.7 million.

Cooper is demanding the implementation of a new "flexible" pay system that would allow management to set each worker's pay separately based on productivity, leading to wage cuts for some of up to 40 percent.

The lockout began just days after workers rejected this scheme.

The company is blaming the union for the failure of negotiations. Cooper told the *Toledo Blade* that it had made an offer to extend the current contract—already a concessions contract—until February 26, or 30 days after a new contract is implemented at the firm's plant in Texarkana, Texas, whichever comes last.

Cooper spokesman Michelle Zeisloft claims the offer was presented to the union seven times—most recently on December 20—and accuses the union of not informing its members in order to force the timing of a deal to coincide with one at the Texarkana plant.

"We do not believe that the union has communicated all of these offers to their membership nor shared them

fully with the media because their motives for keeping their membership on the picket line would become blatantly clear," Ms. Zeisloft wrote in an email to *The Blade*.

Locked-out Cooper Tire worker Scott Chisholm has almost 24 years at the Findlay plant. He told the WSWS, "I think the biggest thing is—at least in my opinion—we've been out a month already. They want to extend it [the contract] for a year. What's going to happen in a year? Now we've already lost a month's work. They're not going to change their plans in a year. Why not get it done now while we're at the table? They're not wanting to negotiate is the biggest thing.

"It's going to get like the olden days where whatever the company told you, you took it and that was it."

The workers at Cooper's Texarkana plant had already voted to authorize a strike even before Cooper locked out its Findlay employees in November.

Chisholm explained: "They did that before our contract was up. We never took a strike vote. We told them we wanted to work through it . . . negotiate while we're still going through it—that we would not strike on them. And that's what didn't make sense—that they're putting in the press that they didn't want both plants out at the same time . . . well, didn't you just put us out on the street? That wasn't our choice. We wanted to keep working.

"They're making a big deal about us lining up when they're the ones who set that alignment up three years ago. They did it to themselves.

"They're trying to make it sound like we're all ganging up on them. It's frustrating."

USW Local 207L Financial Secretary Ron Coldren told the *Toledo Blade* that the union hopes to resume negotiations next Tuesday or Wednesday. Since the lockout began, only four negotiating sessions have

taken place.

The State of Ohio recently ruled to remove the block on the Findlay workers unemployment benefits, so now after a month, locked-out employees are beginning to collect benefits.

Cooper has no intention of backing down on its demands for a “flexible” pay scheme, while the USW leadership prostrates itself before the media and so-called “public opinion.” The reality is that the struggle of the Findlay Cooper workers has massive sympathy among local workers as evidenced daily on the picket line. To win this struggle requires a turn to mobilize that support in defense of the Cooper Tire workers, independently of the unions who will leave the locked-out workers isolated.



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